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JOHN R. GERARD, Editor-in-chief/SIDNEY CORTEZ, Associate Editor/FRANK EDWARD LEE, Art Director



DANDRIDGE WAS fifty and hollow-cheeked. He unstopped the bottle and poured drinks for both of us.

He had already packed. His duffel bag, which probably contained all he had in the world, lay in one corner. When the tide turned, I would row him out to my schooner and we would leave by the cut through the reef.

Eight months before, when I had first stopped here, he had gotten very drunk and told me why he had fled to the atoll. And now whenever he drank, he told me again.

"Just four seconds," he said. "If you took the spanner and made just a quarter turn to the left, you heard four distinct loud ticks, and then..." He showed yellow teeth. "Not enough time to scramble out of the hole, not enough time to run, but just enough time to realize that in four seconds you were going to be blown to bits."

Dandridge had been an officer in one of the units deactivating time bombs and duds which fell in the London area during the blitz.

I sipped my drink and listened to Dandridge talk. One man would go down into the hole where the bomb lay. Just one man. There was no sense in more than one person being blown up at a time. And a telephone line was strung between him and his partner—several hundred feet away.

And while the man in the hole worked, he would talk. He would describe his every action—the turn of a screw, the loosening of a bolt—and if anything went wrong, his partner—his survivor—would know at which precise point the accident had occurred and would try to be more cautious if ever again he met a similar bomb.

Dandridge's eyes went to the sea horizon for a few moments, expecting to see a sail, but hoping he would not. And then he spoke again. "After a while, the Germans reversed the firing mechanism, so that a quarter of a turn to the right set off the bomb. And later they varied the bag—sometimes it was a quarter of a turn to the left, and sometimes a quarter of a turn to the right."

Dandridge kept talking and eventually he got to Lieutenant Washburn.

Lieutenant Washburn had been

RUN WITH THE TIDE

by Jack Ritchie

handsome, well-born, and educated. His commanding officer, Captain Dandridge, was the son of a greengrocer and had come up through the ranks.

"It was in July," Dandridge said. "Washburn had just returned from a weekend's leave. I gave him just time enough to put down his bag before we took a lorry to the East End where one of the bombs had been located in the ruins of a warehouse."

Dandridge refilled his glass. "It was Washburn's turn to go down the hole. We strung the wire and I took up a station down the street with the earphones and listened as Washburn worked and talked. He removed the cap of the bomb without difficulty and then said, 'Well, Captain, it looks like we have another one of the tickers.' And then he said, 'Captain, I'm making a quarter turn to the left.'"

Dandridge's eyes seemed to relive the moment. "And then I heard it. Four times. *Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . . tick.*"

I could almost imagine what it had

***He turned the bomb
into a booby trap and
spent the rest of his
life running from
the victim***

been like in that hole, next to the bomb . . . and listening to those four ticks.

And the bomb did not explode.

Dandridge wiped his forehead. "When I got to the hole, I found Washburn still at the bottom, his face absolutely dead white and his eyes frozen with fear. He was completely . . . unresponsive. It took four of my men to get him out of there and to the hospital."

Dandridge finished his glass. "I don't know who told him when he became rational again—probably someone had seen me when . . ."

Dandridge turned to me. "Don't you understand? It was meant to be a *joke*. Just a joke. I had disarmed the bomb the day before."

His glance flicked to the sea again and then back to me. "I . . . I transferred out as soon as I could. I heard . . . in North Africa . . . that Washburn had recovered. Fully recovered, mind you, but he still hadn't given up his mad determination to find me . . . to *kill me*." Dandridge tilted the bottle to his lips. "After the war I decided not to return to England. And one day in Paris, I saw him—Washburn—on the street looking up at my apartment. That was in 1946. And then again in Lisbon . . . and New York . . . and San Francisco."

Dandridge stared past the white combers reaching for the beach. "He's out there right now. I can *feel* it."

In my wallet lay a letter from a friend in England. Answering my questions, it informed me that Lieutenant Washburn was now a solicitor, happily married, and except for his honeymoon in Paris, he had not strayed from the shores of England since 1946.

Dandridge drank from the bottle again. "It was just a joke," he said. "Just a little joke."

But I watched his eyes and I knew that it had been more than just a little joke. When he had had enough drinks to dull his fear, he would look back to a terrified man crouched beside a bomb and once again he would smile.

No, I would not be the one to tell him that he had been fleeing from a phantom.

I finished my drink. "All right Dandridge, the tide's right. You can start running again." 🌿